



## Flathead County Transportation Advisory Committee

### Minutes

Thursday, April 1, 2021

Meeting was held via Zoom

<https://zoom.us/j/95960804373?pwd=WFIFaUVCalVoRVk1blc5YURoWEtYZz09>

Meeting ID: 959 6080 4373

Passcode: 482838

Kyle Waterman called meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

**Members Present:** Randy Brodehl (Commissioner), Jenny Cloutier, Shawna Himsl, Jessica Kramer, Marcy Roberts, Robert Smith, Kevin Warrington, Kyle Waterman, Bryce Baker

**Staff Present:** Dale Novak (Transportation Director), Kristina Stone (Transit Operations Coordinator), Elizabeth Wood (Dispatcher)

**Guests:** Ron Catlatt (Regional Director, Office of Senator Steve Daines), Ma'ayan Dembo (Transit Fellow, Glacier National Park), Wade Kline (KLMJ Engineering), Lois Katz (community member)

**Call to Order:** TAC Chair Kyle Waterman opened the meeting.

**Public Comments:** There was no public comment.

**Chair Opening Remarks:** Kyle welcomed everyone to the meeting. Members and guests introduced themselves.

**Approval of Minutes:** Minutes of the February 4, 2021 meeting were reviewed. Kevin Warrington moved to approve the minutes. Second by Shawna Himsl. All in favor. Motion Passed.

#### **Department Changes to Transit Update- Dale Novak Transportation Director**

- For 50 years the transit department has been under the Agency on Aging umbrella. On March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021 the commissioners split the departments.
- Last fall we went to the On Demand service. Ridership has been on a very steady incline each month.
- Last Tuesday the publication of the RFP was approved. The deadline to submit a proposal is set for May 3<sup>rd</sup>.
- In the meantime the heavy call volume will be a challenge for the dispatchers.

- **Comment-** Commissioner Brodehl mentioned that he felt we did a great transition moving from fixed routes to the On Demand service. He also commented that Dale has been excellent in leading this. He feels that the community is responding very well and he looks forward to the future of our transit and he likes the direction we are going.
- **Question-** Shawna asked what the current size of our fleet is.
- **Answer-** We currently have 19 busses including vans. We are running 12-15 right now using different sizes of vehicles for after school and special trips.
- Dale explained how we are currently organized. Everyone working in the office is a dispatcher and additionally have secondary job duties. Elizabeth works on advertising, Lyndsay on Finance, Kristina does the operations managing employee issues, routes, and schedules, and Alan takes care of the fleet and facilities.
  - **Question-** Bryce asked how our ridership compares to pre-covid and is the ridership affecting our funding.
  - **Answer-** We are funded through 5311 Transaid, rental car fees, and Voted Mill from property taxes. Our Covid funding ended yesterday, March 31. The Covid funding we received helped us get a back log of vehicle maintenance completed. When comparing fixed transit and paratransit pre Covid to now we are operating at about 95% of where we were without Glacier Park numbers.

#### **Summer Service GPIA- Dale Transportation Director**

- There was some discussion about GNP ticketed entry announcement. Dale encouraged everyone to send any ideas for commuter service or to and from the park via email.
- We had some discussion regarding Glacier Park International Airport
  - GPIA is involved in a huge expansion.
  - There is a huge rental car shortage causing big issues for visitors trying to get to and from the airport.
  - When looking at the flight schedules there is about 22 hours out of the each day that rides would be needed to get to and from the airport during the peak season going from June 14<sup>th</sup>- September 6<sup>th</sup>. The Airport wants to access a fee each time we enter for pick-ups and drop-offs.
  - **Comment-** Tegen Vine commented that the chip seal project between Hungry Horse and West Glacier will probably be a bottle neck and potentially cause major delays with any commuter runs we have.
  - **Comment-** Jenny Cloutier commented that rather than just corresponding through email we should get the Hoteliers and the airport more directly involved in discussions.
  - **Comment-** Wade Kline suggested perhaps working out some sort of a partnering with the airport with regard to the fees they might impose versus possibly paying us.
  - **Comment-** Commissioner Brodehl mentioned that although the valley is growing, we need to be gradual with our planning and careful about who is paying for the services (tax dollars). Pertaining to possible Airport shuttles Brodehl also stated that it should be a user paid service regardless.
  - **Comment-** Dale agreed about the user pay for airport service model. He mentioned that the rides to and from the airport could be a premium ride with an increased rate for the fare.
  - **Comment-** Shawna Himsl mentioned that she would pay a substantial amount of money for rides to and from the airport.

- **Comment-** Dale assessed that it is really an unknown as to approximately how many people would use a service to and from the airport and that it would be quite a gamble.
- **Comment-** Shawna Himsl mentioned that we could work on getting some approximate numbers.
- **Comment-** Commissioner Brodehl again mentioned that we need to be very aware of the cost to the taxpayer, and additionally we must be very careful not to compete with private industry. We cannot subsidize this service with taxpayer money.
- **Comment-** Shawna asked the group are we going to have a robust system or not.
- **Comment-** Commissioner Brodehl stated that we need to ask ourselves is this the will of the people. Is it the will of people that live in Marion, Hungry Horse and Olney that we provide bus service to and from the airport?
- **Comment:** Shawna Himsl mentioned that every year there are community surveys that are conducted in all these areas. Perhaps we can ask everyone what they would want.
- **Comment-** Brodehl mentioned that this group serves a purpose as an advisory to the commissioners.
- **Comment-** Dale reiterated that an Airport service should be a user and partner paid service. We would hate to implement a new service then have to remove it due to it not working.
- **Comment-** Wade Kline mentioned that we have all the origin data to help with planning new routes and schedules.
- **Comment-** Kyle W. stated that the issue with getting into the park due to the ticketed system could be a major problem, perhaps we should focus on the airport instead.
- **Comment-** Kyle W also mentioned that we should be thinking about what the role of the TAC is.
- **Comment-** Dale added that the TAC is an advisory committee, the last time the By-laws were revised was June 12, 2014. He has sent a copy to Lyle for review.
- **Question-** Jenny C. asked if we could get funding for the airport run at a federal level.
- **Comment-** Ron mentioned that he does not know that there would be a role in getting help federally for this, ultimately, he believes it would be up to us to work with the airport and keep the communication going with them.
- **Comment-** Dale mentioned that every department in the county answers to the County Commissioners. If we want to make any major changes to our operations, we need to put those ideas before the commissioners.
- **Comment-** Kyle requested that anybody that may have any ideas or feedback, to please email him and Dale. He also mentioned that they will work on putting together another work meeting. The TAC board can be a barometer of what is going on in the community.
- **Comment-** Kevin W. commentated that he serves on the TAC as service to the community. He feels that Kyle nailed it with the Barometer. He also feels his duty as a TAC member is to look over Dale's shoulder, watch for red flags and give him feedback.
- **Comment-** Courtney S. stated that as someone raising four kids in Columbia Falls, she watched Whitefish grow and there is a lot of frustration in Columbia Falls now with regard to transportation needs.
- **Comment-** Jessica K mentioned that she seemed to be seeing a lot of students using public transportation.
- **Comment-** Tagen mentioned that the Columbia Falls comment and the other comments come back to the Community Needs Assessment. Transportation needs always come up on the top 5.

- **Comment-** Jenny C. commented on how the housing crisis and the transportation issues are yoked together. She also mentioned that she had not really thought of it until the being on the TAC.
- **Comment-** Kyle stated that he joined the TAC because he had met many people that were not happy with how Eagle Transit was operating. Over the 4 years he has been on the TAC he feels we have started going in great directions.
- **Comment-** Jenny C commented on her recent visit to the Mountain Climber office.
- **Comment-** Kyle encouraged other TAC members to take the time to go meet the staff and ride the system. He also feels that part of our duty as TAC members is to carry part of the load. Kyle encouraged everyone to come together and brainstorm outside of the regular meeting so that we can give better feedback to the commissioners.

#### **Member announcements- Dale Transportation Director**

- Dale mentioned that the RFP was so important. We have very clear needs on the technology front and help with planning as well. We are so grateful that the commissioners approved the publication of it.
- Fares are scheduled to come back in July sometime.
- Dale mentioned that we did get a grant for planning purposes.
- We will have training for individuals that may not feel comfortable using the app.
- We are looking forward to the app for many reasons, one of the huge impacts it will have will be reducing the call load on our dispatchers which will also free up drivers that are doing double duty to be able to drive full time again.
  - **Question-** Kevin asked if we have found any companies that can provide the services we need.
  - **Answer-** Dale stated that we have several that appear to have a lot of what we would need to be successful. A couple companies that we will be looking at are Uber and Via.
  - **Comment-** Kyle encourages everyone to read the RFP if they get a chance.
  - **Comment-** Dale mentioned that we have also been visiting with the park and Blackfeet Transit out of Browning looking at ways that we can possibly partner with them.

#### **Closing comments**

- Kyle thanked Dale for staying on and commented on how much we appreciate all the work he is doing.
- Commissioner Brodehl commented that he really appreciates the direction that we are going. He also appreciates the slow growth and progress that has been well thought out.

Next meeting to be held April 15th.

Meeting Closed at 3:30 p.m.

